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**Denison presentation  
shows it is a "Great Place"**

**Presentation  
made for Iowa  
Great Places  
Initiative**

by Gordon Wolf

Denison put on a presentation Wednesday afternoon, designed to "wow" the judges for the Iowa Great Places Initiative, and the three judges - members of the citizens advisory committee for the initiative - seemed impressed with the presentation and the community.

The Iowa Great Places Initiative is a new program initiated by the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with 18 state agencies.

Denison is one of 74 "places" in Iowa competing to become one of three pilot projects for the program. Along with the honor of being selected, the "prize" would be the channeling of resources from the participating state agencies.

Originally 146 "places" responded with invitations to the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs. Seventy-two decided to collaborate with another place or decided they were not ready to compete this year.

The public was asked to gather at the Donna Reed Theatre beginning at 4 p.m. Wednesday to be there for the judges' arrival, scheduled for 4:30 p.m. The judges, who had been attending a presentation in Logan, would arrive 10 minutes late, so one of the presenters, Eric Skoog, led the waiting crowd in doing the "wave", singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" in rounds with rowing pantomimes by other presenters, and having the audience practice the chant, "Denison, Iowa" to perform when the judges walked into the theater. The diversion put the crowd in an exuberant mood for the presentation that

followed.

Judges for the presentation were Bill Menner of Grinnell, Claire Celsi of Des Moines and Pat Hanafan of Council Bluffs. Menner is involved in economic development, Celsi is employed by a public relations, marketing and advertising agency in Des Moines. Hanafan is mayor of Council Bluffs.

Menner is the chairman of the 12-member citizens advisory board for the Iowa Great Places Initiative. Members of the advisory board serve as judges.

"It's been an interesting experience going to so many towns. They've been enthusiastic, excited and visionary," said Menner. "We want to be 'wowed.' We were 'wowed' here and have been 'wowed' in other places."

There have been no decisions yet on what types of "places" will be the pilots, other than there is not going to be duplication, added Menner, explaining, for example, that two trails or two urban districts would not be selected as pilots.

"We are going to be diverse (in our selection) but we haven't decided how we're going to be diverse," Menner stated. "We're waiting to see how these (presentations) all play out."

Celsi explained that the judging panels don't stay the same, but are split up depending on the driving distance to a presentation. Sometimes panels don't even remain the same in the same day.

She said that on October 3 the citizens advisory board would make its decision on the three pilot "places" during a meeting in Des Moines. She envisions each member will have their top three among the presentation they've seen and that there may be overlap among each judge's top three

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choices. All 74 presentations and written documents are available to all board members.

The formal announcement of the three pilot places will be October 11 in Iowa City.

Celsi added that, among other things, what the advisory board is looking for is a community that demonstrates good cooperation and is ready to go with a project.

"The ultimate goal is to go back to the legislature and say, 'Look what these places have been able to do with our help'," she stated.

Celsi pointed out the board really doesn't see its job as picking three winners but as picking the first three "places" ready to move forward.

"The other places that have given presentations will still maintain their coaches," she said, adding the intent is to have other communities selected as great "places" in the future.

"I'm humbled by what I've seen, the accomplishments I've seen and the can-do attitudes," Celsi stated.

Hanafan, like Celsi, will judge 24 presentations, and also like Celsi, he sees no losers among the presenters in the Iowa Great Places Initiative.

"There has been a regeneration, a re-exciting in people," he stated.

Hanafan also complimented the diversity effort in Denison.

"Denison should be the benchmark for diversity in Iowa," he stated. "Other places have struggled with it, but Denison has done it a little differently."

City Manager Al Roder said the city wants to thank the community for its support in the presentation.

"It's the community that makes it work," he stated. "We appreciate the community for coming out and supporting this."

### The presentation

Denison's presentation showed the accomplishment of the community, but also pointed out to the judges the areas where the state could help continue to move the community forward.

The presentation began with

video tape that was produced for Pat Summerall's "Champions of Industry" program and was aired on CNN Headline News. Summerall, best known as a sportscaster, was the narrator for the film. The film

talked about the history of the community, welcoming its growing Latino community, housing, the streetscape project and the downtown regeneration, the Donna Reed Museum, Foundation and Performing Arts Festival and the town's theme, "It's a Wonderful Life." The film also talked about Denison's four tenants - family, community, charity and hope. Mayor Ken Livingston, City Manager Al Roder, Superintendent Mike Pardun, bed and breakfast proprietor Sylvia Bachmann, contractor Luis Navar and former council member Joel Franken were among the people who were interviewed on the film.

The "live" presentation was started by Sylvia Bachmann, who gave the welcome and told how Denison has the credentials and ambition to be selected as an "Iowa Great Place."

Other presenters included:

Attorney Michael Mundt who spoke on heritage

Mayor Ken Livingston, whose topic was strategic planning

Jesus Ayala, employee coordinator and community liaison at Farmland Foods, who spoke about diversity

Nancy Westenberg, a board member for the Donna Reed Foundation, whose topic was the arts

Superintendent Mike Pardun, who spoke on education

Denison Youth Council member Sarah Glenn, who spoke on youth

Brenda Martens, chairperson of Denison's land-use committee, who spoke on housing needs

Crawford County Engineer Paul Assman, who addressed transportation needs

Eric Skoog, owner of Cronk's Café, who talked about cooperation in Denison

And City Manager Al Roder, who spoke on partnerships

### A closing look

The presentation closed with a film presentation produced

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by Blue Sky Creative. Using original music as a background of sound, the presentation showed pictures of Denison's past, its arts and culture, education, diversity, housing, cooperation, economic growth and community. The title or tagline for the production was, "Looking to the past to build our future."

More on the presentation will be detailed in Tuesday's *Bulletin*.

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